

China vs US – Great Power Hegemony

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In this short piece, I will be arguing against Professor John J. Mearsheimer's theory of military power hegemony based on the US model and explain why it is flawed for three critical reasons.

The first reason is his assumption of anarchy is flawed. It assumes that in a world where there is no higher authority, nation states will want to dominate others regionally to become a regional hegemon and eventually other regional hegemons globally. The US is being held as the prime and currently the only example in this model.

The dilemma of no higher authority has, however, already been resolved by man's invention of a supreme God and religions that go with their gods. These religions and subsequent laws have conditioned most humans and their societies to act rationally and respectfully towards each other. Humans, particularly those who live in developed economies, perceive the longer-term benefits of acting in a restrained manner when it comes to military power domination, at least in a physical sense. There are exceptions, of course, but these are increasingly rare and they have eventually failed. Tribes, clans and kingdoms have risen but have eventually fallen. Even empires have risen and fallen. The causes of their falls are many, too many to list here. According to Professor Paul Kennedy, nations that have risen through military power have eventually fallen. One simple explanation for this is the highly destructive aspect of the use of military power which, in its ultimate use, is antithetical to the preservation of humanity in general. The US, so far, seems to be unable to anticipate this eventuality and, therefore, the only exception to the rule. However, its reign as a global hegemon is already in question as explained in the next two reasons.

The second reason is that US military power is supposedly based on it having 750+ naval bases spread around the world, which it uses to militarily dominate the world and stop other regional military powers from rising. However, naval power has not helped the US win any of its major non-regional wars. Neither has its use of highly destructive air power, or even of its soft power. Well known examples are Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. Naval bases are also highly vulnerable to missile attacks as well as local insurgencies. More recently, the US fighting through a proxy, has failed to win the Ukrainian war against Russia. Israel is an oddity, as it's not conducting a war but rather a genocide of indigenous people, in a repetition of what the European settler colonials had carried out in the past in British dominions. Therefore, the US military power, so-called, is an expensive fig-leaf and is not real power.

In addition to the above, the US itself is withdrawing militarily from various regions in the world, including Europe. Its manufacturing power is also in decline.

The third reason is that the real power of the US lies in its unique economic power due to the position of the US Dollar, being the world's only reserve currency. However, as we are seeing, this power is eroding fast due both to the rise of China's economic power and the dedollarisation of the world economy.

China's power is also an economic power. Unlike the US, China's power is based only on its manufacturing capability and trade. China is likely to become the world's supreme economic power within the next decade. That, by itself, should not be an existential concern to other powers. The world is very much used to having economic hegemons.

Mearsheimer's assertion that China will follow the US model of becoming a military hegemon do not tally with China's history, geography and declared intentions. Apart from his theory of great power hegemony, there is no reason why China would want to emulate a failed and flawed model. After all, Professor Paul Kennedy's study of the rise and fall of great powers has shown that powers that use military means to gain power over others will sooner or later fall. It's time that the US and its Western allies have learnt their lesson that might is not always right, and is never right in the ultimate sense.